

How To Make Drills More Exciting by Using Pictures

By Inara Dimpere

During the past few years, I have been working with the teachers in the Baltic republics: (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), demonstrating multiple ways of using pictures for teaching language skills. A surprisingly large number of teachers do not use visuals on a regular basis in their classrooms. Due to limited access to literature on methodology, we have had to develop our own techniques for using pictures. I myself, have developed about 20 different activities which need only one or two sets of simple pictures but which can be used to teach different skills, but mainly speaking and writing.

Often I draw the pictures myself, since commercially-produced games do not always correspond to the demands of the curriculum. But if you cannot draw, ask your pupils or their parents to help, or, cut pictures out of old workbooks.

I have been using simple pictures of everyday objects, animals, fruits etc. and, though it may seem quite boring to deal with the same set of cards for a long period, children never tire of playing with them. Children use their imagination and can see their own pets and toys behind the lines of the visuals. Besides I always try to put an element of surprise in the lesson-by playing a new game with a well-known set of cards, or replaying an old game with a new set of cards with unfamiliar pictures. Another reason for using the same pictures again and again is to refresh the students' memories and give them the opportunity to review vocabulary previously learned.

A lot can be done with only one set of cards, but teachers have more possibilities if they use two or more sets of the same picture: one set is left as it is, or is colored by the teacher or students; a second one can have both pictures and words, and a third set just words. If the teacher has photocopying possibilities, s/he can provide the children with one set of cards so that they can play some games at home with their family or friends. Children can also be asked to color their own set, as well as the set they will use in class-that way the children feel more motivated and involved in the whole process.

Following are some games and activities that I have developed to encourage participation in learning English. While using these activities, the teacher should not forget that even the most boring drill can be made exciting with the help of drama techniques. And finally, after the students have practiced the activities, they can take over the role of teacher in the activity, thus varying their participation.

Activities with One Set of Cards

Name it!

Played in groups of five to 10 students. All cards are displayed on the table face down. Player one picks up one card and repeats the word or gives a whole sentence, depending on his/her level or particular needs. If the player is correct s/he can keep the card. If not, s/he places the card on the table (face up) and the next player has a turn. Often the other pupils provide the necessary word saying, for example, "Don't you know that it is a book?" The teacher can also provide the word if no student is able to come up with the correct response.

Guessing game

Played in groups of five to 10 students. All the cards are in a pile face down. Player one tries to guess the first card by naming it, then takes the card and sees if s/he is correct. If correct, the student can keep the card and make a second guess. If not, Player two has a turn.

Variant. If the player has guessed a word that belongs to the same group; e.g., the player has said "an apple" and there is a picture of an orange on the card, it is a correct answer because they are both fruit. At a more advanced level it is possible to ask the students to prove the connection between the guess and the picture on the card; e.g., a player has said "a banana" but there is a picture of a monkey, so the player can say "monkeys love bananas" and then s/he can keep the card.

Twenty questions

Played in groups of 10 to 20 students. The teacher chooses one card from the set. Students take turns trying to guess what it is by asking yes/no questions; e.g., "Is it an animal? Is it big? Does it live in the jungle?" The student who succeeds can keep the card or take the place of the teacher.

Variant. It can be made easier for the beginners, if the teacher gives some clues as to the category; e.g., "Is it a thing or an animal?"

Give it to me

Played in groups of 10 to 15 students. The cards are distributed among the players. The teacher calls out the names of the objects on the cards. When the students hear their cards mentioned, they give them to the teacher. Often other students will help those who cannot remember the exact word.

Kim's game

Played in groups of five to 10 students. From 10-12 cards are displayed face up on the table. Students have a minute to look at them, then the teacher covers them, and one of the students is asked to recall them, or, each student writes down as many as s/he can remember.

Shopping

Played by the whole class. Some students play the role of shop-assistants, the others are customers. The goods-some five to 10 cards (with no written identification) are displayed face up on the tables (it is even possible to have different shops with different assortments of goods). Customers walk around the classroom trying to buy as much as possible through identifying the objects on the cards. After everything is sold, the roles can be changed.

Odd man out

Played in groups of two to seven students or individually. The teacher gives out a set of five to seven cards to each group or individual. The students have to decide which things do not belong to the set and why. According to their level these explanations can be mentioned very briefly or described in written form.

The ABC game

Played in groups of two to six students or individually. Each group or student has 10 to 20 cards to arrange in alphabetical order according to the initial letters of words. The students may be asked to make an alphabetical list of the words in written form.

Do you like it?

Played individually or in groups of two to five students. The players' task is to arrange the pictures; e.g., five to eight pictures of animals, from the one they like best to the one they like least. The teacher can ask them to explain their preferences orally or in written form.

Listen up!

Played with the whole class. One or more sets of cards are distributed among the students, three to five cards per student. The teacher tells a story mentioning the objects that are on the students' cards. Whenever the students hear their cards mentioned, they hold up the appropriate cards.

Man from Mars

Played with the whole class. The teacher walks around playing the role of the man from Mars who has never seen the objects, animals, etc. before asking, "What's this?" The students answer the teacher naming the cards or even explaining them in greater detail.

Invent a story

Played in groups of five to 12 students. All cards are in a pile face down. Player one takes a card and starts a story, using the word on the card; e.g., a card with a picture of a tree on it and s/he begins, "Once upon a time there was a big tree." Player two takes the next card (with a picture of a book) and tries to continue: "Little Mary liked to sit under the tree and read a book on a warm summer day."

Activities with Two or More Sets of Cards

Memory game

Played in groups of four to seven students. Two sets of cards are spread out face down. Player one turns up one card, identifying it, then turns up another one trying to find the matching pair. If the player succeeds, s/he keeps the pair and has another turn. If not, Player one puts the cards back face down and it is the next student's turn. The student who collects the most pairs is the winner.

Find your pair

Played with the whole class. Since an even number of players is necessary for this game the teacher may have to join the class to make an even number. Two sets of cards are distributed

among the students so that everybody has one card and there is a matching pair for each card among the players. The students walk around and try to find their pairs by asking questions. They can show the cards to each other only after they have found the matching pair.

Variant. Find your group; e.g., animals, clothes, vegetables, etc.

Bingo

Played in groups of five to 25 students. One set of cards is distributed among the students (the number in the set dependent on the number of students playing the game), and the other set is used by the teacher. The teacher calls out a word and when the student hears it, s/he turns the card face down. The first player who has turned over all his/her cards calls out "Bingo" and is the winner.

Arranging pictures

Played in pairs. Each student in the pair receives the same set of five to seven cards which form a story. Player one arranges the cards in order, so that the other student cannot see them. Then the player describes the arrangement either orally or in writing. His partner arranges his cards accordingly. Player one shows his cards to the partner and they compare the arrangement.

Find the differences

Played in pairs. Each pair of students get the same cards. They describe them trying to find the differences. After they have finished, they show each other their cards and compare the differences and similarities.

Matching pairs

Played in groups of five to eight students. Two sets of cards are distributed among the students of the group, six to eight cards each. If any player has a matching pair, s/he calls it out and puts the cards on the table. Then Player one asks another player for a card s/he needs. If this student has it, it is given to Player one and s/he puts down that pair and asks another student for a match. If there is no match, it is that student's turn to ask somebody. The student who gets rid of all his/her cards first is the winner.

Don't lose a seat!

Played with two or four sets of cards in groups of even numbers of students (8, 10, 12, etc.) or with three sets of cards in groups of odd numbers of students (9, 15, etc.). All players have one card and sit in a circle. The teacher stands in the middle and calls out one of the pairs (or 3, or 4). The students who have these cards must get up and quickly exchange their places. While they are doing so, the teacher tries to sit down on one of the chairs and one of the students remains in the middle, gives his/her card to the teacher and calls out the next pair (or 3, or 4).

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